

TO A YOUNG GIRL.

The stars' untarnished gold gleams in the
moons of thy hair,
The heavenly hue of April's blue lives in thy
wondering eyes.
The lips which kiss the crimson pale clouds
that flush the skin
Have pressed thine own, and lingered lightly
on thy cheeks so fair;
No wave of passion on thy heart hath sobbed
in secret sighs.
Nor hath ambition, brought to thy smooth
brow one touch of care.
The gods, with gifts supernatural and supreme,
have dowered thee,
With purity and beauty thine, a precious leg-
acy.

—Daniel K. O'Sullivan in Southern Bivouac.

THE GHOST.

My father's farm was fully eleven
miles, over a lonely and deserted road,
from the little town of B—, and al-
most midway between the two points
above lay the old Sharp farm, desolate
and run to weeds, simply because the
owner, for reasons hereafter to be given,
was forced to content himself from year
to year with the grazing it afforded his
cattle and the few meager loads of hay
saved from the neglected meadows.

The former proprietor, old Jacob
Sharp, or Lamo Jake, as he was more
frequently called by reason of an unfor-
tunate physical deformity, known to the
doctors, I believe, as equino-varus, and
commonly as clubfoot, had taken a no-
tion a few years before to hang himself
to a rafter in the old barn, and by that
little act had completely ruined the rep-
utation of one of the best and most fer-
tile holdings in the country.

From whatever source originated,
weird and uncanny stories soon began
to circulate respecting the old home-
stead, the purport of which were that
poor old Lamo Jake, who had been so
impatient to get out of the world, was
now equally anxious to get back, but
having foolishly disposed of his carnal
covering to gratify the whim of an idle
moment, he was now compelled in re-
visiting thus the glimpses of the moon,
to restrict himself to such hours and
places as the native modesty of any
proper minded ghost would be most apt
to suggest.

Many and marvelous were the legends
which the "auld slashers" of the coun-
try, as the Great Antiquary would call
them, were in the habit of relating to
such juvenile and feminine ears as were
most readily captivated thereby; and
many and many a night have I seen my
sister and younger brothers go to bed
with eyes like saucers after an evening's
seance with one of these raconteurs.

But, as the New Light of Asia has it,
that is another story.

One tenant of the place had fifty bush-
els of wheat carefully winnowed one
night, old Jake being distinctly seen by
a member of the family, whom the noise
of the mill had aroused, standing in the
time honored white nightgown and
surrounded by a bluish halo, industri-
ously turning the crank; but while he
was congratulating himself that these
visitations promised to be of a Brownie
rather than of a Goblin character the
next night, outrageous to relate, the
winnowed wheat was just as carefully
mixed with an equal quantity of rye
from another bin, the scandalous pro-
ceedings being celebrated with flashings
of light, the most outlandish racket and
discordant peals of unearthly laughter.

These financial losses and annoyances,
while bad enough in their way, might
still have been struggled against for
some time had not his ghostship taken
it into his pneumatic head to begin a
series of domiciliary visits threatening
more directly the unfortunate man's
personal peace and welfare.

A bright glare, emanating from some
particular room, would convey to the
startled inmates the idea that the house
was in flames; and a rush being made
thither the light would disappear in an
instant, to the accompaniment of loud
groans and laughter, rattling of fur-
niture and pattering of ghostly footsteps
down the hallways.

Frequently the farmer during sleep,
usually when most worried, would find
himself suddenly and disgracefully fired
out of bed by some invisible agency;
windows and crockery were smashed,
bells rung at midnight, and on one oc-
casion his wife had the wits nearly
frightened out of her by finding her
lord sleeping one morning by her side,
his hands folded on his breast and two
peanies placed in orthodox fashion over
his eyes.

These happenings, the reader will
easily conceive, had the effect of limit-
ing his occupancy of the Sharp messuage
strictly to the period of his lease, and
some three or four others who succeeded
him made equally short stays.

Others complained most of the trouble
they had with their cattle. Horses se-
curely stalled began about midnight to
raise a most terrific uproar, and if not
promptly liberated would invariably
thrash down the stable door and be
found next morning huddled together in
the farthest corner of the pasture.
Frequently one would be found bearing
the marks of the saddle and other evi-
dences of a severe night journey, al-
though in such instances, in justice to
old Jake, the fact that one of the boys
was courting a squire's daughter in a
neighboring county may have borne
some relation to the phenomenon.

Weird lights burning through the
chinks of the barn and about the pre-
mises were so common to the neighbors
that when the boys and girls happened
to be belated at a dance, a husking or
an apple paring they told their parents
they came home by the light of old
Sharp's lantern.

I am not going in this age of divided
skies and long distance telephones to

put myself on record as the man that
saw Jake Sharp's ghost; but what I did
see and hear the night I slept in that
old barn—well, I'm going to tell you
about it.

I had been to B— and was returning
somewhat late. The night was dark
and starless, and the faint flashes of
lightning which began in the west kept
increasing in frequency and brilliancy
behind me till, just as the old Sharp
gables loomed up from the blackness be-
fore me, the storm I had been appreh-
ending burst upon me like the opening
of a waterspout.

Never before had I seen such a down-
fall. The rain descended in one solid
sheet, and the earth fairly shook with
the continuous roll of the thunder. The
lightning was fierce and vivid.

Under the circumstances there was
nothing to do but to take shelter, for a
time at least, in the old barn; and you
can easily imagine with what a creepy
sensation I heard the rickety doors creak
on their rusty hinges as I swung them
open and got my team as quickly as
possible under the leaky cover.

Striking a match just to get my bear-
ings, I unbitted the horses and supplied
them with hay, of which there was a
quantity in one of the mows; and then
lighting my pipe, that incomparable
solace of the solitary, I began to take
stock of my surroundings.

The storm showing no sign of abate-
ment, the thunder crashes following
each other in quick succession, and the
lightning playing vividly through the
chinks and broken shingles, I began
with as much stoicism as I could assume
making preparations for my present
comfort.

Selecting a dry spot in the haymow,
I removed some of my wet outer gar-
ments, and with the aid of horse blank-
ets succeeded in improvising a tolerable
bed; but not, I assure you, with the re-
mote idea of sleep.

Nevertheless, in an hour or so, the
thunder and lightning having almost
died away, although the rain still came
down in torrents; worn out with fatigue
and soothed by the odor of the hay, I
fell into a deep and quiet slumber.

How long I slept I know not, but I
was suddenly awakened by the snoring
and stamping of the horses, and starting
up, became immediately conscious of a
faint bluish light floating in the air di-
rectly over the seat I had so lately occu-
pied.

It resembled no other light I had ever
seen, but seemed to be simply a ball of
bluish or amethyst colored fire, which
circled about through the air with a
queer undulating movement. It im-
parted to me as I looked at it a strange
feeling of dizziness and nausea.

While I sat staring, fascinated by the
mysterious light, I was horrified to hear
a long, low groan, coming seemingly
from the body of the wagon, followed
almost instantly by the sound of my own
name, repeated as distinctly as I had
ever heard it in my life—"Joe! Joe!"

With the cold perspiration beginning
to break from every pore I sprang to my
feet, and as I did so the light floated
slowly up to the rafters and disappeared,
while a low, rattling laugh echoed
through the darkness.

All doubts as to the truth of the stories
I had heard about the haunted barn were
now pretty fully dismissed. I felt that
I was fairly in for it.

By the feeble glare of my matches,
which only seemed to intensify the dark-
ness, I strove to penetrate the wall of
blackness about me, but not a thing could
I see.

My heart was chilled, my blood frozen
in my veins, and I was only prevented
from dashing open the doors and escap-
ing into the more friendly darkness
without by the simple fact that terror—
shall I say it?—had rendered me in-
capable of motion.

Do not think it was imagination.
There could be no imagination about a
sound so distinct. The low, wailing
groan, like that of a man in his death
agony, rose slowly on the stillness again,
followed as before by the harsh, devil-
ish, cackling laugh and the words,
"Joe!" "Joe!" repeated, as I imagined
in my horror, by my own father's voice.

This time the light did not appear, but
a new terror had been added to the
scene. I fancied I heard a creaking
sound, and straining my ear till my
brain seemed to crack made out, as I
imagined, quite distinctly the sound of
footsteps creeping toward me across the
bare planking of the floor.

I am honest enough to confess that in
striking another match my hands shook
like those of a man with the palsy.
Again everything was quiet. Nothing
visible except the horses, with heads
thrown back, cowering against each
other.

I was relieved by the reflection that
no material danger at least threatened
me, but a new trouble now overtook me.
I spilled my matches on the wet hay.

I sat down now in despair, and as I
leaned my face upon my hand I could
feel the arteries in my temples throbb-
ing like trip hammers. I felt that I
could never live through the remainder
of that awful night and preserve my
reason.

As I pressed my hands upon my throbb-
ing temples and vainly strove to miti-
gate with reason the blind violence of
my terror, I suddenly uttered a wild cry of
horror as a long, wet, clammy arm, or
what I took for one in the darkness, was
thrown tightly around my neck with a
cold clasp that nearly strangled me.

As I struggled desperately, with a
sickening sense of horror, to release my-
self from the slimy coils of what I
thought must be some gigantic reptile,
that same low, mocking, devilish laugh
came cackling through the darkness
again.

The plunging of the horses, the fend-
ish laughter, groans and calling of "Joe!
Joe!" grew louder and more demoniac,
till, maddened with horror, by a super-
human effort I flung the infernal thing,
whatever it was, from me, heard it
strike with the proverbial dull thud
against the side of the barn, and forget-
ting horses, storm, darkness, distance
and everything else, I rushed from the
infernal place, and with hair erect and
the clamor still ringing in my ears, fled,
nor paused to breathe till I had covered
the entire distance between there and
home, where I arrived, haggard and be-
spattered, as the first streaks of the
gray dawn, the white winged angels of
a glad deliverance, came to meet me
from the east.

Quickly I told my story, with every
detail of touch and coloring possible,
you may be sure, and having succeeded
by the earnestness of my manner in suit-
ably impressing the minds of the entire
family, a circumstance, in view of the
character the place already bore, not at
all difficult, I hitched up another horse,
and in company with my father and
younger brother, returned to the scene
of my late horrible experiences, and the
investigations we there made in refer-
ence to the noises and other phenomena
will I am afraid, only disgust those im-
aginative minds which are always on
the alert for startling denouements.

The gnawing sounds we found had
been produced by the chafing of the
wagon hub against a loose board in the
haymow, and every time the animals
reached forward after their fodder the
movement carried a rusty, guttural,
scraping of the turntable, which simul-
lated the sound, "Joe, Joe," with suf-
ficient nearness to mislead a cooler head
than mine was just at that time.

The demoniac laughter which had so
horrified me was of equally absurd or-
igin, being simply the rattling and clat-
tering of a thin, loose clapboard high
up in the gable whenever a gust stronger
than usual struck it. For the light I
could find no explanation other than the
only possible fact that it was simply a
phosphorescent exhalation from a little
swamp near by, one of those luminous
methylic vapors, variously known as
will-o'-the-wisp, Jack-o'-lantern, ignis
fatuus, etc.

The place was infested with rats, and
it was doubtless their scurrying back
and forth over the floor which sounded
so much like stealthy footsteps—either
that or the falling of the large rain-
drops which found their way through
the leaky roof.

There too lay the reptile which had so
nearly strangled me—a long, soft strip
of the inner bark of one of the cedar
rafters, which, saturated by the rain,
had fallen across the back of my neck
as I stooped forward, and you can read-
ily appreciate the sensation such a thing,
unexpected and in total darkness, would
be apt to produce.

While we were making these discover-
ies and remarking how a little daylight
and good common sense will knock the
props from under the best ghost story
ever gotten up, we were all startled by
a sudden rat-tat-tat on the barn door.

My father hastily unfastened it, ex-
pecting, of course, to meet one of the
neighbors, or possibly a strolling tramp,
and I noticed a queer expression come
over his face. There was not a soul there.

He had hardly closed the door, how-
ever, when the sharp rat-tat-tat was re-
peated, this time considerably prolonged.

Again the door was opened quickly,
and again not a soul was in sight.
There was a little door in the rear of
the barn, and leaving my father and
brother looking at one another in a some-
what funny manner, I quietly unfast-
ened this, and as the knocking had re-
commenced, slipped quickly around out-
side to the front of the barn, only to see
a large redheaded woodpecker diligen-
tly tapping away on the door in search
of his breakfast.

We got away from that place with all
the expedition possible, and ever since
my skepticism in reference to the vivid
and ornate stories of a similar character,
which we so frequently hear, is pretty
radically confirmed by the simple re-
membrance of my own blood curdling
experience that night—with the ghosts.
—J. R. Parke in Buffalo News.

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